



Equitable & Sustainable Heritage Districts: Lessons Learned from Little Havana

Corinna J. Moebius, Ph.D.
CorinnaJMoebius.com

This presentation is © 2022, Corinna J. Moebius



Heritage Tourism District

A designated area to experience places that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. Aimed at supporting a healthy and sustainable economy; animating historic neighborhoods and downtowns; and protecting, sharing and enhancing locally, regionally (or nationally!) significant cultural, historic and natural assets and resources.

(adapted in part from the National Trust for Historic Preservation)

Benefits of Heritage Districts*

- Fuel **employment and entrepreneurial** opportunities;
- Stimulate **local economies** and growth of **local, independent businesses**;
- Incentivize protection of **cultural, historic and natural resources**;
- Lead to **broader recognition of (underserved) communities, populations and geographies** through the sharing of **cultural, historic and natural resources**;
- **Protect unique character/identity of a place** (e.g., through zoning regulations);
- Attract **investments in infrastructure** and public safety, including public transportation, wayfinding, façade improvements, sidewalk widening, etc.

* When tourism is done well!

Regenerative Tourism



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Regenerative Tourism Principles

- **Holistic understanding and living-systems approach:** Interactions between every stakeholder throughout the entire tourism value chain have an impact on each other and the entire ecosystem.
- **Collaborative:** Stimulating collaboration and partnerships between a wide range of stakeholders from government, to the private sector, to the voluntary sector, and the communities.
- **Diverse by nature:** Diversity in various income streams helps decrease the reliance of ecosystems and communities on tourism income. Diversifying between the different segments of the market also helps to reduce various economic and geopolitical risks and enhances resilience.
- **Inclusive and equitable:** Involvement of the local communities to strengthen the overall ecosystem;
- **Transformational and inspirational:** Creating experiences for the guests that are life changing and that bring forward the uniqueness of each place. Activities that showcase cultural heritage, folklore, gastronomy, local landmarks and wildlife responsibly.
- **Environmentally responsible:** Taking good care for the environment through the management of natural resources and biodiversity and the protection of fragile landscapes and wildlife.
- **Cultural stewardship:** Protection of local cultural heritage and traditions and local people who happen to be the best persons to take care of biodiversity and natural ecosystems thanks to their ancient wisdom and knowledge passed on from generation to generation.

The Future of Tourism: Guiding Principles

1. See the whole picture
2. Use sustainability standards
3. Collaborate in destination management
4. Choose quality over quantity
5. Demand fair income distribution
6. Reduce tourism's burden
7. Redefine economic success
8. Mitigate climate impacts
9. Close the loop on resources
10. Contain tourism's land use
11. Diversify source markets
12. Protect sense of place
13. Operate business responsibly.



www.futureoftourism.org/guiding-principles

2022 National Travel & Tourism Strategy

- Focuses federal efforts to support travel & tourism to U.S. (see also Brand USA)
- Envisions private & public sectors collaborating to increase volume & value of tourism
- 2 of the 4 Pillars are:
 - **Ensuring Diverse, Inclusive, & Accessible Tourism Experiences**
 - **Fostering Resilient and Sustainable Travel & Tourism**



Equity & Underserved Communities

- **Equity:** The **consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment** of all individuals, including those belonging to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment (e.g., **persons of color**; members of **religious minorities**; **LGBTQ+** persons; persons with **disabilities**; persons who live in **rural areas**; and persons otherwise adversely affected by **persistent poverty or inequality**).
- **Underserved Communities:** Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as **geographic communities**, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

Definitions adapted from *Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government* (White House Memo, January 20, 2021)

Little







The official travel site
of the USA.



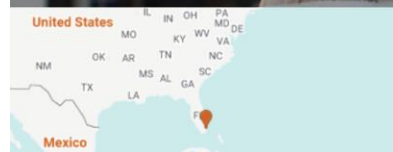
Destinations ▾

Trips ▾

Experiences ▾

Florida

A Tasty Tour of Little Havana



Urban Heritage Districts: Problems

- Representations of groups may be “**exoticized**” through food, entertainment, and other products, reinforcing **stereotypical images and ethnoracial narratives**;
- **Economic dependence on tourism** puts communities at risk during COVID/climate-related crises;
- Heritage Districts risk “**Disneyfication**”: meeting needs of tourists and tour providers far more so than residents and leading to loss/degradation of cultural, heritage, natural resources;
- **Overtourism** can overwhelm small businesses and local resources and widen disparities, leading to increased pollution and plastic/food waste, exposure to COVID, ecological degradation, and social dislocation;
- Members of underserved populations may be subjected to **increased surveillance and exclusion** from public spaces.

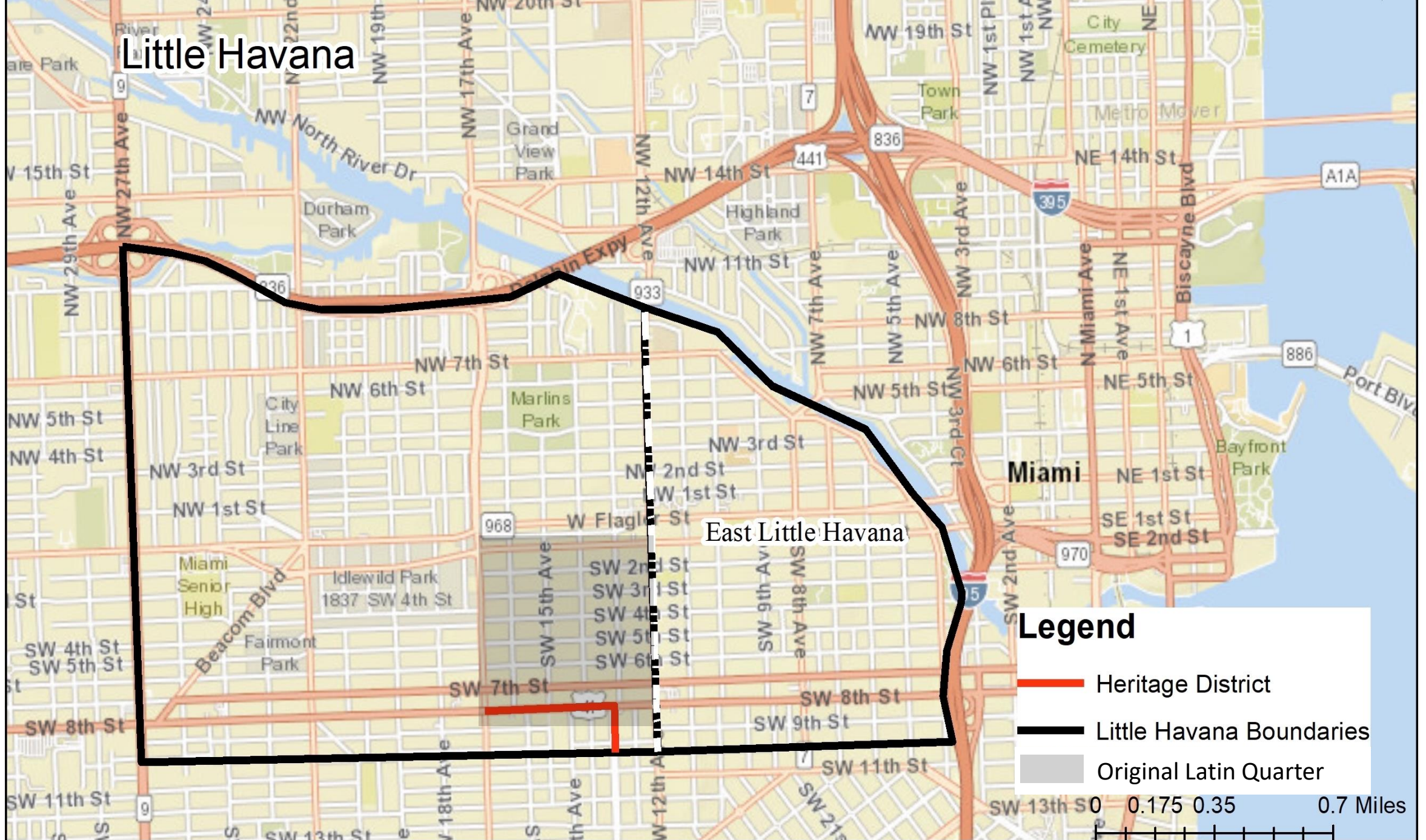
Little Havana

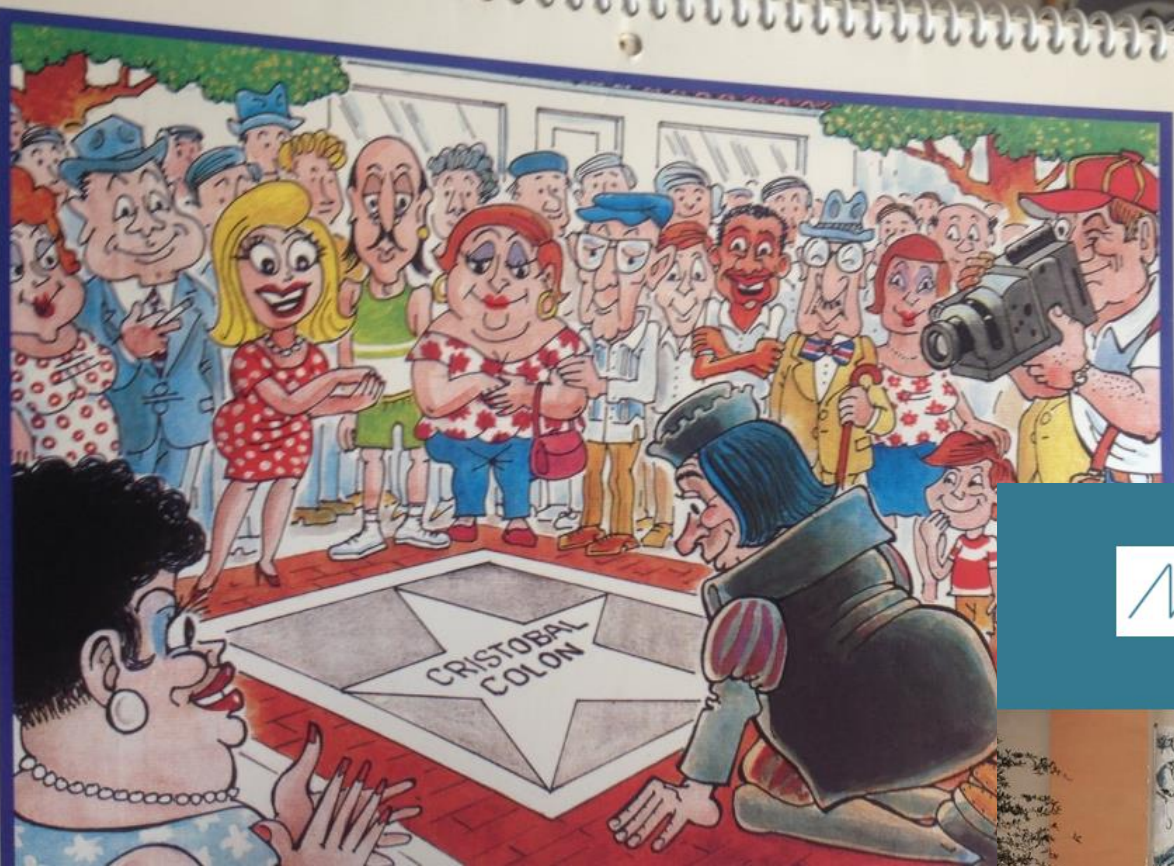
East Little Havana

Legend

- Heritage District
- Little Havana Boundaries
- Original Latin Quarter

0 0.175 0.35 0.7 Miles





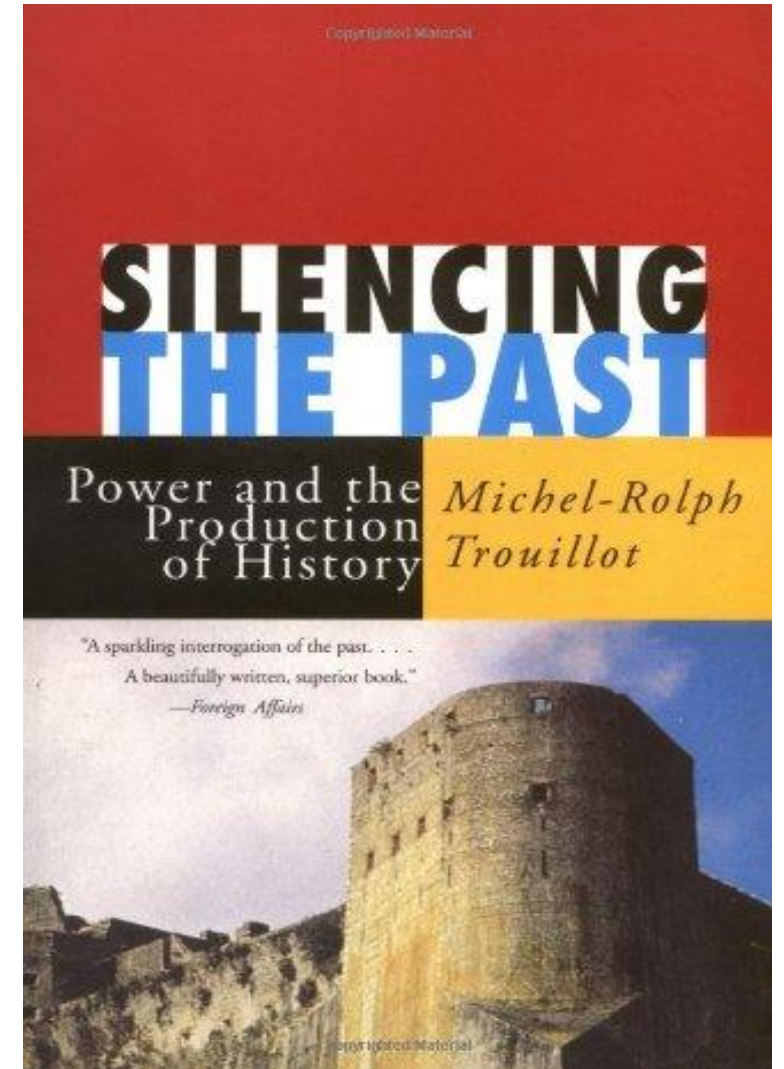
Continental National Bank calendar
Cuban Heritage Collection,
University of Miami



Stories in Segregated Space/Time

Heritage District

- Certain Groups (not Others)
 - Certain Heritage
 - Certain Eras (Moments in Time)
 - Certain Spaces
-
- Separateness reinforces racial and other binaries
 - Separateness can provide fertile ground for “single stories”
 - Removes attention to systems, continuities, relationships



The Role of Heritage Districts in Making Ideas of Social Difference

Stories "feel real" because they are shared through embodied experiences, site-specific storytelling and widely distributed representations;

- **Embodied experiences:**

- Multi-sensory experience of walking through the space, social interactions;

- **Site-specific storytelling**

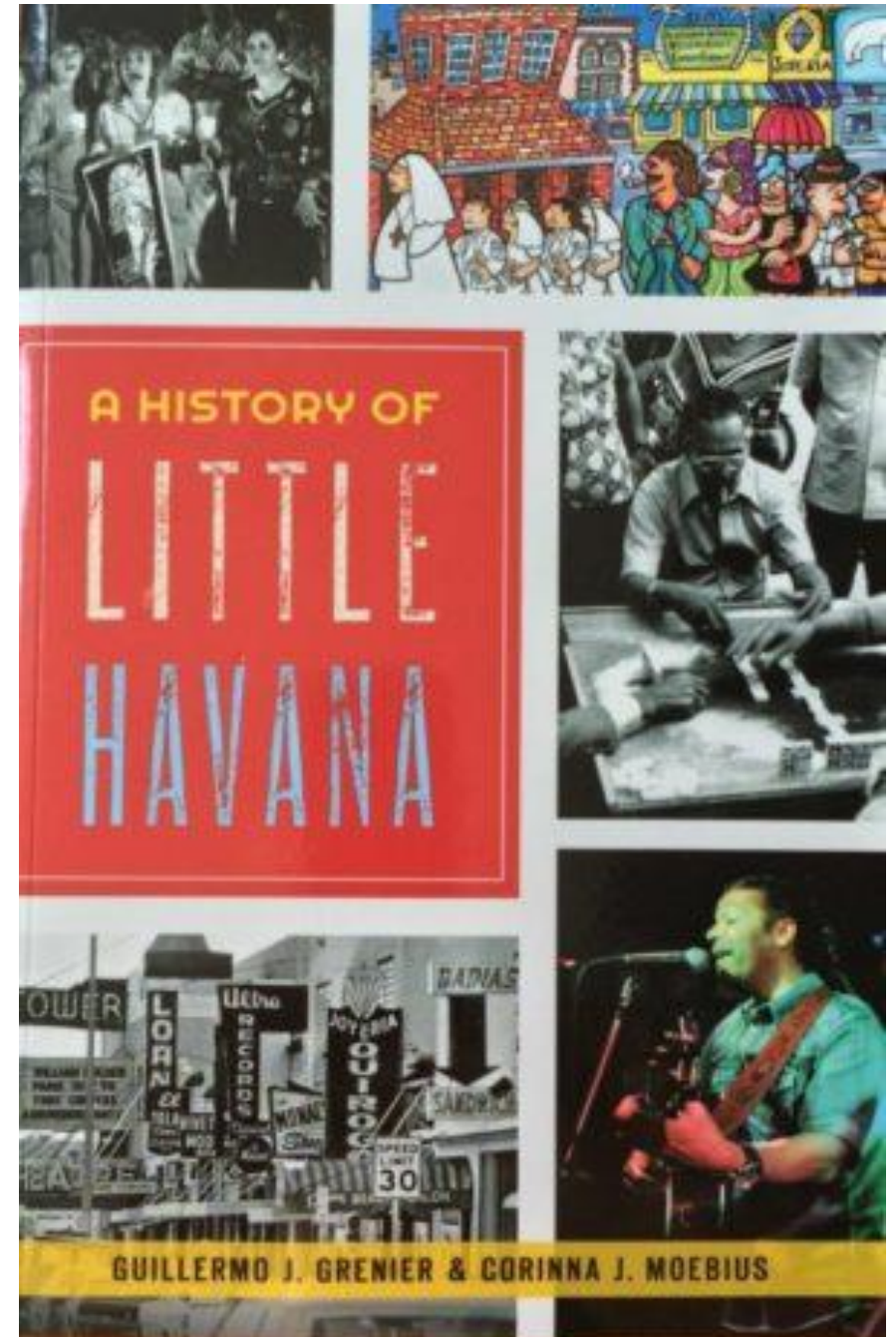
- Stories told in person by tour guides, public historians, representatives of cultural/historical sites, shop and restaurant owners.
- Wayfinding signs, plaques, mural imagery.
- Spacing/location and content of monuments, murals, named buildings/parks;
- Condition of built/natural environment, people in environment.

- **Widely distributed representations**

- Brochures, travel articles and blogs, travel guides, social media, TV, postcards, etc.

- **Support research** (e.g., focus groups, interviews, ethnographic, archival) **to identify untold stories and omitted perspectives of underserved populations and communities;**
- Investigate the **making of dominant narratives/ single stories** in the district *and at related tourism destinations;*
- **Collaborate** with other heritage districts to shift and challenge single stories;
- Consider **creative ways** to share untold stories (e.g., site-specific performances);
- Develop a **tour guide training program** for locals, to share untold stories and omitted perspectives.

ACTIONS









Miami Motel Stories,
Juggerknot Theater Company

ACTIONS

- Identify (through engagement process) and protect existing and potential sites and public spaces and their uses by underserved communities/ populations for **embodied (“intangible”) forms of heritage and memory-making**;
- Identify and protect highly valued sites of historical and cultural significance to **underserved communities** (tell the stories!);
- Consider how you might creatively share histories of **disappeared sites**.



Out-of-state tourism operators hire non-local, low-wage labor, bring tourists only to certain sites

CITY

NEIGHBORHOOD

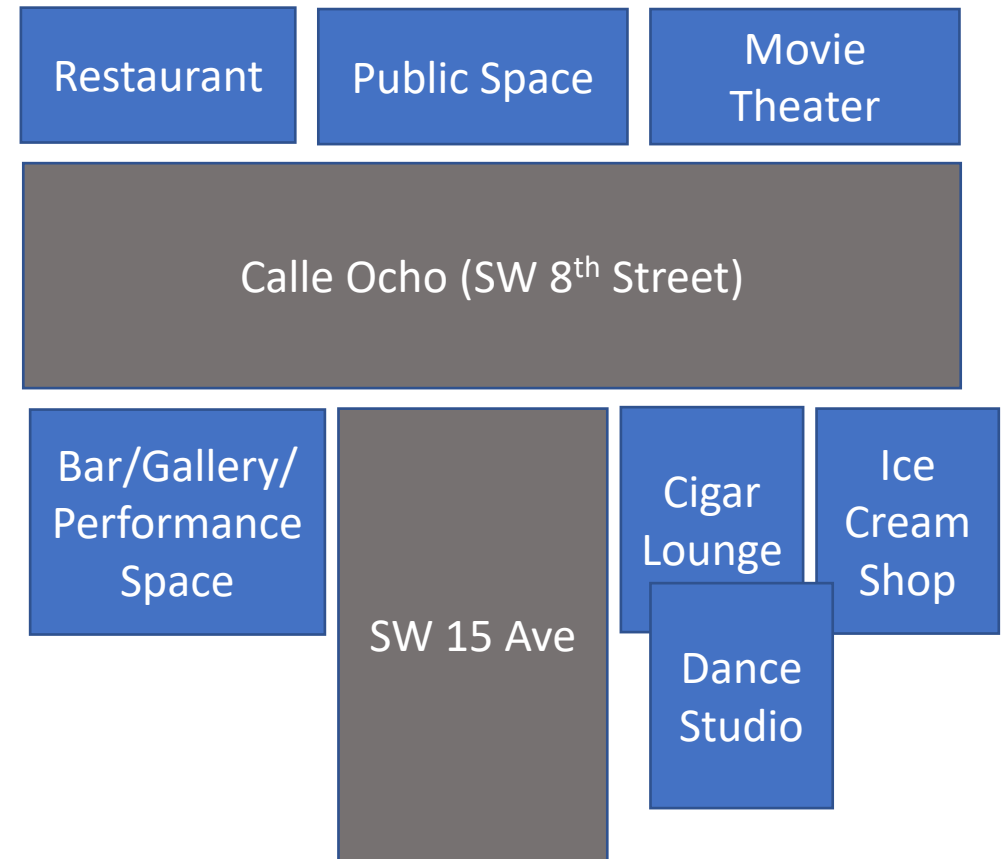
HERITAGE DISTRICT

- Focuses on quantity of tourists to exclusion of residents
 - Receives major investments/infrastructure improvements
 - Only certain businesses get major economic benefits
- Workers can't afford to live in neighborhood
 - Workers within neighborhood denied best-paying tourism jobs
 - Tourist demand for AirBnB limits access to housing for residents
 - Neighborhood lacks in infrastructure improvements
 - Pollution of motorcoaches, plastic waste, etc. impacts neighborhood
- Workers outside of neighborhood get best-paying tourism jobs/tip jobs
 - Entrepreneurs from outside neighborhood have tech support/training/credit/financing to grow business opportunities
 - Workers outside neighborhood have education training to get jobs

The "Single Story" About Heritage Districts as Economic Boosters Can Obscure Systemic Inequity

ACTIONS

- Identify “hubs of activity” within the district – existing potential “eco-systems” through which local businesses in district can work together in positive, symbiotic relationships;
- Identify “flows” of residents and tourists in district and time/spaces for shared activities and resident-prioritized activities;
- Transform select buildings into mixed use (office/tourism, and community spaces);
- Lower barriers to local resident participation as vendors in festivals;
- Offer tax incentives for socially entrepreneurial businesses / building owners;
- Accommodate small business innovations when approving licensing (e.g., art gallery / café; gallery / performance space).





ACTIONS

Develop a collaborative governance structure (e.g., community partnership) with equal participation by government, the private sector, and local organizations that represent the community's diversity.

- Work across agencies and to develop/manage a **district plan** (and regulations).
 - Include a community engagement process.
- Identify **equity and sustainability-related needs, assets and resources**;
- **Reduce physical and social barriers to access.** Ensure the district is **safe, inclusive and welcoming for diverse visitors *and residents***;
- Create and implement a **monitoring and evaluation framework** for equity/sustainability indicators. **Report/share equity/sustainability data** with the public.
- Advocate for **funding** that supports capacity-building efforts, including technical support.





ACTIONS

Build **collaborative relationships** between travel/tourism organizations, workforce and small biz development programs, local colleges/universities (including HBCUs) and other stakeholders to:

- create and sustain **well-paying, quality tourism jobs and entrepreneurial initiatives**;
- boost **technical support and tourism skills** for residents and business owners, especially from underserved communities/populations;
- build knowledge, awareness, dialogue and actions related to **equity and sustainability needs and opportunities**; and
- expand **inclusive civic engagement**.

